(c) There are twenty two mutually agreed Land Customs Stations along the India-Nepal border with provision for customs check-posts. Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) has four hundred and forty six Border Out Posts on the India-Nepal border. There are five posts along the border where immigration is done in respect of third country nationals.

(d) No.

(e) No.

(f) and (g) Do not arise.

Delay in issuing of Passport

†618. SHRI SHREEGOPAL VYAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it has been brought to the notice of Government that due to delay in issuing of passport in definite period, less number of passports are being issued;

(b) whether new rules are being framed in consultation with Ministry of Home Affairs in this regard; and

(c) if so, the main features thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI SHASHI THAROOR): (a) Ministry is aware that in a few Passport Offices there is delay in issuing passports and remedial measures are being taken so that delays are avoided.

(b) and (c) Yes. The Government had entrusted the National Institute of Smart Government (NISG), Hyderabad, with the task of undertaking a time-bound study on the passport issuance system, including its IT aspects, with the objective of delivering passport-related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible and reliable manner. The Government accepted the NISG report as a result of which the "Passport Seva Project" has been launched. The proposal is to have 77 Passport Seva Kendras all over the country where the non-sovereign functions involved in the passport issuance process, such as the initial scrutiny of the application forms, acceptance of fee, scanning of the documents, taking photos etc, will be performed by the selected Service Provider. The sensitive activities, such as police verification, printing and dispatch of passports, will be performed by Government staff. The project is expected to result in the issue of passports within three days, and where police verification is required, within three days after completion of the verification process. The Project is expected to be implemented fully to cover the entire country by the middle of 2010.

Agreement to fight Terrorism

619. SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether treaties/agreements have been made with various countries for mutual cooperation in combating the growing menace of terrorism;

(b) if so, the details thereof specifying areas of joint-working, if any, envisaged in such agreements with respective countries;

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.